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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
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10/707,510

12/18/2003

Frederick W. Ryan JR.

F-775

1509

919 7590 03/26/2008

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EXAMINER

JABR, FADEY S

ART UNIT

PAPER NUMBER

3628

MAIL DATE

DELIVERY MODE

03/26/2008

PAPER

**Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.**

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

<b>Office Action Summary</b>	<b>Application No.</b> 10/707,510	<b>Applicant(s)</b> RYAN ET AL.	
	<b>Examiner</b> FADEY S. JABR	<b>Art Unit</b> 3628	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

### Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

### Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 25 February 2008.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**.                      2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

### Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1,3-12,14 and 16-23 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1,3-12,14 and 16-23 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

### Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on \_\_\_\_\_ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.  
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).  
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

### Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All    b) ☐ Some \*    c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
  2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

\* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

### Attachment(s)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)                       | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413)           |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)   | Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____                                      |
| 3) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08) | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application |
| Paper No(s)/Mail Date <u>3/18/08</u> .   | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                          |

## **DETAILED ACTION**

### ***Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114***

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on 25 February 2008 has been entered.

### ***Status of Claims***

Claims **1, 14** and **20-22** have been amended. Claim **15** has been cancelled. Claim **23** has been newly added. Claims **1, 3-12, 14** and **16-23** are pending and are presented for examination.

### ***Response to Arguments***

2. Applicant's arguments filed 25 February 2008 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

3. Applicant argues that the cited references fail to teach prompt refund processing followed by determining if the refund request is valid. However, Examiner notes that Montgomery teaches the end user's account will be credited for the misprint; the misprint postage transaction information will be date/time stamped in the postage database and flagged as "refunded"; a refund request is issued to a postage refund center and the refunded postage transaction is entered into a statusing database, so that the delivery status can be checked for six months (determining

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if the refund request is valid) (0170, 0188). Thus, Montgomery teaches refunding the postage and then determining if the refunded postage has been subsequently used.

4. Applicant argues that the cited references fail to teach or suggest, "if the mail piece is used after a refund payment, assessing a postage fee and a fine." Examiner notes that Gullo discloses tracking would permit the suspension of postage printing capabilities for such users, and/or the reporting of the identity of such a user to a body capable of taking further action against the user for submitting improper refund requests. It should be noted that provision can be made for such a user to repay the amount they owe (0021, also see Claim 21). Therefore, Gullo teaches levying penalties onto the fraudulent user.

#### ***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112***

5. The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.

6. Claim 1 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.

As per **Claim 1**, the recitation, "*promptly* processing the refund request", is vague and indefinite. It is unclear to the Office what the applicant is attempting to claim by the recitation. Appropriate correction is required in the indicated claims and any subsequent claims.

***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103***

7. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

8. Claims **1, 3-12** and **14-22** are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Gullo et al., Pub. No. US2004/0044586 in view of Montgomery et al., Pub. No. US2003/0101147 A1, hereinafter referred to as Gullo and Montgomery, respectively.

As per **Claim 1**, Gullo discloses a method for processing a postage refund request for a mail piece comprising:

- receiving a refund request including a tracking identifier from a user system (0015);
- determining if the refund request is valid (0018-0019);
- if the refund request is not valid, initiating a refund error process, wherein (0018-0019, also see Figure 2),
- the determination of whether the refund request is valid includes determining whether the tracking identifier has been observed in a mail stream (0019-0020).

Gullo fails to disclose *promptly* processing the refund request. Gullo discloses processing a refund request (0019-0020). Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose monitoring the tracking identifier after processing the refund request in order to determine if the mail piece is used after a refund payment. Gullo discloses the information should further be processed to ensure that the

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particular IBI associated with the tracking/label number and/or that there is not an active scan event for the tracking/label number (0019).

Montgomery teaches the end user's account will be credited for the misprint; the misprint postage transaction information will be date/time stamped in the postage database and flagged as "refunded"; a refund request is issued to a postage refund center and the refunded postage transaction is entered into a statusing database, so that the delivery status can be checked for six months (determining if the refund request is valid) (0170, 0188). Montgomery shows that the step of providing a refund then determining if the transaction has been subsequently used. Further, Montgomery teaches the postal authority enters the refunded postage transaction into the master tracking computer system, where the delivery status can be checked for six more months...the refunded postage polling module periodically polls the tracking information database to determine if a mail piece associated with any refunded postage transaction has been delivered (0188).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo and include providing a refund then processing the refund request for validity and monitoring for the scan events of the transaction as taught by Montgomery since the claimed invention is merely a combination of old elements, and in the combination each element merely would have performed the same function as it did separately, and one of ordinary skill in art would have recognized that the results of the combination were predictable.

As per **Claim 3**, Gullo discloses the refund error process includes a fraud inquiry (0019-0021).

As per **Claim 4**, Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose the refund error process includes notifying a postal authority. However, Gullo discloses a system that may be carried out online or by directly going to a local post office. Therefore, when a user receives a refund error from the system (operated by the USPS) they are receiving the notification from the postal authority (Figure 1). Moreover, when a user has their account suspended for suspicion of fraud, they have to contact the local post office to reactivate their account (0021). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo and include notifying a postal authority, because it allows the postal authority to suspend fraudulent postal accounts therefore preventing further fraud.

As per **Claim 5**, Gullo discloses determining if the mail piece is associated with the user that submitted the refund request (0018).

As per **Claim 6**, Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose determining if a refund test period has completed; and if the refund test period is not completed, performing another determination of whether the mail piece has been observed in the mail stream. However, Gullo discloses queuing the request for a designated period, for example, seven days, to check for scan events (0019-0020). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method of Gullo and include queuing for scan events over a

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designated period of time, because it allows the system to check multiple scan events over a designated period of time to ensure that there is not an active scan event for the tracking/label number (0019).

As per **Claims 7-10**, Gullo fails to disclose the tracking identifier includes a 22-digit delivery confirmation PIC code, a PLANET code and a POSTNET code, a postage serial number and a postage meter postage ascending register value, or a postal ID tag. However, Montgomery teaches a method for detecting postage fraud using tracking identifiers. Further, Montgomery discloses tracking identifiers being one or two-dimensional barcodes, PLANET or POSTNET codes (0060-0063, see Figures 19-22). Further, Montgomery teaches associating the information based indicium along with the tracking identifier, where the IBI contains ascending register value, license zip, the certificate serial number, etc. (0080, 0096, also see Table 2). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method of Gullo and provide a tracking identifier that includes various codes and pertinent information as taught by Montgomery, because it allows the system to associate a plurality of information associated with the mail piece when attempting to track the mail piece through the mail stream.

As per **Claims 11-12 and 16-18**, Gullo discloses sending the refund request to the postal authority (see Figure 1). Gullo fails to disclose processing the refund request includes aggregating a group of valid refund request associated with a postage broker, processing the refund request includes aggregating a group of valid refund requests received from a plurality of



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users and sending a group refund request associated with the aggregated group of valid refund request to a postal authority, sending aggregated refund request data to the postage broker.

However, Montgomery teaches a refund eligible inquiry that allows a user or administrator working on behalf of the mail user to poll eligible refund requests, where a user can select the eligible refund requests to send to the USPS (000170-0171, 0174-175, see Figures 26-28).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method of Gullo and allow a user to choose from a plurality of postal transaction to select the transactions that require a refund in order to send to the postal authority as taught by Montgomery, because it allows a user to select the correct transaction or transactions from a plurality of transactions and more efficiently process the refund requests in order to minimize the refund return around time.

As per **Claim 14**, Gullo discloses the refund test period is variable (0020). Gullo fails to disclose the variable length of the refund test period *depends upon the class of service of the mail piece*. However, Gullo discloses the amount of time that would be considered an undue period may depend on administrator preference, but a period of between about 1 and 30 days is preferred, with a period of about 10 days being considered optimal (0019). Further, Gullo discloses the queuing the request for a designated period, for example seven days, to check for scan events. (This period may be varied) (0020).

Montgomery teaches the refunded postage transaction is entered into a statusing database, so that the delivery status can be checked for six months (0170, 0174).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo, and include many variable test periods as taught by Gullo and Montgomery since the claimed invention is merely a combination of old elements, and in the combination each element merely would have performed the same function as it did separately, and one of ordinary skill in the art would have recognized that the results of the combination were predictable.

As per **Claim 19**, Gullo discloses the tracking identifier is unique over a first period of time (0015).

As per **Claims 20 and 21** Gullo discloses a method for processing a postage refund request for a mail piece comprising:

- receiving a refund request including a tracking identifier from a user system (0015);
- determining if the refund request is valid (0018-0019);
- if the refund request is not valid, initiating a refund error process (0018-0019, also see Figure 2);
- if the refund request is valid, processing the refund request (0019-0020), wherein,
- the determination of whether the refund request is valid includes determining whether the tracking identifier has been observed in a mail stream (0019-0020).

Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose receiving a plurality of refund requests from each of a respective plurality of user systems. However, Gullo discloses receiving a user request. The system of Gullo however is capable of receiving more than refund request. Further, Montgomery teaches a

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user interface which lists multiple transactions in which a user can select (see Figures 25-27).

Moreover, Montgomery teaches a device ID that identifies the USPS-assigned ID for each postage vendor, and the user account for which the postage indicium will be issued (0096).

Montgomery also teaches that the end user's account balance is securely stored in a centralized postage-issuing computer system (0003). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo and include allowing a plurality of refund requests.

Gullo discloses the refund test period is variable and the refund request corresponding to a prior postage dispense operation (0019-0020). Gullo fails to disclose the variable length of the refund test period *depends upon the class of service of the mail piece*. However, Gullo discloses the amount of time that would be considered an undue period may depend on administrator preference, but a period of between about 1 and 30 days is preferred, with a period of about 10 days being considered optimal (0019). Further, Gullo discloses the queuing the request for a designated period, for example seven days, to check for scan events. (This period may be varied) (0020).

Montgomery teaches the refunded postage transaction is entered into a statusing database, so that the delivery status can be checked for six months (0170, 0174).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo, and include many variable test periods as taught by Gullo and Montgomery since the claimed invention is merely a combination of old elements, and in the combination each element merely would have performed the same

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function as it did separately, and one of ordinary skill in the art would have recognized that the results of the combination were predictable.

As per **Claim 22-23**, Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose monitoring the tracking identifier after processing the refund request in order to determine if the mail piece is used after a refund payment, if the mail piece is used after a refund payment, assessing a postage fee and fine. Gullo fails to *explicitly* disclose monitoring the tracking identifier after processing the refund request in order to determine if the mail piece is used after a refund payment. Moreover, Gullo discloses the information should further be processed to ensure that the particular IBI associated with the tracking/label number and/or that there is not an active scan event for the tracking/label number (0019). Furthermore, Gullo discloses tracking would permit the suspension of postage printing capabilities for such users, and/or the reporting of the identity of such a user to a body capable of taking further action against the user for submitting improper refund requests. It should be noted that provision can be made for such a user to repay the amount they owe (0021, also see Claim 21).

Montgomery teaches the end user's account will be credited for the misprint; the misprint postage transaction information will be date/time stamped in the postage database and flagged as "refunded"; a refund request is issued to a postage refund center and the refunded postage transaction is entered into a status database, so that the delivery status can be checked for six months (determining if the refund request is valid) (0170, 0188). Montgomery shows that the step of providing a refund then determining if the transaction has been subsequently used. Further, Montgomery teaches the postal authority enters the refunded postage transaction into the

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master tracking computer system, where the delivery status can be checked for six more months...the refunded postage polling module periodically polls the tracking information database to determine if a mail piece associated with any refunded postage transaction has been delivered (0188).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of applicant's invention to modify the method and system of Gullo and include providing a refund then processing the refund request for validity, monitoring for the scan events of the transaction and assessing a penalty for fraudulent use of postage as taught by Gullo and Montgomery since the claimed invention is merely a combination of old elements, and in the combination each element merely would have performed the same function as it did separately, and one of ordinary skill in art would have recognized that the results of the combination were predictable.

### ***Conclusion***

Examiner's Note: Examiner has cited particular columns and line numbers in the references as applied to the claims below for the convenience of the applicant. Although the specified citations are representative of the teachings in the art and are applied to the specific limitations within the individual claim, other passages and figures may apply as well. It is respectfully requested that the applicant, in preparing the responses, fully consider the references in entirety as potentially teaching all or part of the claimed invention, as well as the context of the passage as taught by the prior art or disclosed by the examiner.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to FADEY S. JABR whose telephone number is (571)272-1516. The examiner can normally be reached on Mon. - Fri. 8:00am to 5:30pm.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, John Hayes can be reached on (571) 272-6708. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

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Hand delivered responses should be brought to the Customer Service Window, Randolph Building, 401 Dulany Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

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